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FM AMEMBASSY BELGRADE  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0063  
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RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE  
RUEHBW/AMEMBASSY BELGRADE 0109

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 BELGRADE 000269

SIPDIS

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E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [MARR](#) [SR](#) [HR](#) [BK](#) [MK](#) [AL](#)

SUBJECT: SERBIA: PFP ON HOLD, BUT STILL WANTS OPEN DOOR AT BUCHAREST

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Summary

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1. (SBU) Serbia's involvement in NATO's Pfp programs has come to nearly a complete stop since Kosovo's declaration of independence in February. Serbia plans to attend the Bucharest Summit in April, but the government has not yet determined at what level it will be represented. Serbia's MFA hopes the summit will reaffirm NATO's open door to Serbia and reinforce the message of stability in the Balkans. If Serbia can form a pro-European government after its pending May elections, the MFA believes it can revitalize its Pfp membership and enhance its NATO cooperation within a matter of months. End Summary.

PFP Cooperation Comes to a Halt

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2. (SBU) Serbia has ceased almost all of its Pfp activities since Kosovo's declaration of independence, the MFA's Assistant Minister for NATO, Zoran Vujic told poloff on March 14. Since Kosovo's declaration of independence, Serbia has stopped sending nearly all of its participants (both MFA and MOD) to NATO programs. In addition, Serbia has ceased individual Pfp programs with countries that have recognized Kosovo. Vujic confirmed that the GOS had stopped scheduled programs with both Austria and Italy in recent weeks. To fill this gap, the MFA has considered trying to increase cooperation with NATO countries that have not recognized Kosovo, particularly Slovakia and Romania, but Vujic said, at this sensitive time "the MFA must be careful about any form of cooperation." In addition, Vujic confirmed that the MFA's NATO office has been drastically reduced, losing six diplomats in the last several weeks, some of whom have left to serve as Charge d' Affaires in countries where Serbia has recalled its ambassadors (Germany and France) following recognition of Kosovo.

Serbia to Attend Summit, But Level Unknown

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13. (SBU) Despite this freezing of relations with NATO, Serbia still intends to send a delegation to the NATO Bucharest Summit in April, but President Boris Tadic has not yet decided if he will personally attend. Vujic said he hoped the President would make a decision during the week of March 17. If Tadic does not attend, the Serbian delegation would most likely be a "technical delegation," led at the Assistant Minister level, Vujic said.

Bucharest Message: Serbia's Door to NATO Remains Open

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14. (SBU) Serbia's MFA is looking for a positive regional message out of Bucharest that keeps "NATO's door to Serbia open," Vujic said. He said any message regarding NATO's role in the Balkans should focus on how NATO is a source of stabilization in the region whose primary mission is the security and protection of all communities. Vujic stressed that any reference to NATO's role in building up Kosovo's Security Forces would be very detrimental, and "would permanently kill the idea of Serbia joining NATO." Vujic confirmed that the GOS supports the candidacies of Albania, Croatia and Macedonia for NATO membership and supports NATO's enhanced relationship with Bosnia and Hercegovina and Montenegro. NATO's cooperation with Serbia's neighbors will further stabilize the region, Vujic said.

Serbia's PFP back on Track, If DS Wins in May

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15. (SBU) Vujic said Serbia could quickly restart its involvement in PFP if Serbia's pro-European parties (read:DS) win in May. After the elections, assuming a DS, he expected that an Individual Partnership Plan (IPP) could be submitted within a matter of days and Serbia could sign the pending Security Agreement with NATO "within two to three months."

Comment

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16. (SBU) In the aftermath of Kosovo's independence, Serbia's PFP programs, which were already creeping along, have ground to a complete halt. Serbia's democratic leaders, however, are still hoping to hear a positive message coming from the Bucharest summit, but are cautiously distancing themselves from direct interaction with NATO. Post believes, despite MFA's good intentions, it will not be so easy to quickly restart Serbia's NATO programs following May's elections. Though Serbia's insistence that it be begged to join organizations that others beg to join may be off-putting, and its recent behavior in the international arena may be repugnant, the Balkans would be a safer place with Serbian participation in NATO. End Comment.

MUNTER